

A Tillyloss Scandal

By J. M. BARRIE

Author of "The Little Minister," "Auld Licht Idylls," "A Window in Thrums," Etc., Etc.

(Continued)

William and I waded through the whin to a hollow in the hill, known as the toad's hole. It was here that Haggart, returning boldly to Thrums four days after Christy had the last word, feet in with D. Fittis.

"He was cutting away at the whins," Tammas remembered, "and I didna think that the whole time me and him spoke he ever raised his head; he was a terrible busy man, D. Fittis."

Haggart, big, with his buttons, had, doubtless, as he approached the whin-slayer, the bosom of a victorious soldier marching home to music. Nevertheless it has been noticed that the warrior, who thrives on battles, may, even in the hour of his greatest glory, be forever laid prone by a chimney can. For Tammas Haggart, confident that a few minutes would see him in Tillyloss, was preparing a

surprise that rooted him to the toad's-hole like a whin. I have a poor memory if I cannot remember Haggart's own words on this matter.

"I stoal looking at D. Fittis for a while," he told me, "but I said nothing loud out, though the chances are I was pitying the stocky in my mind. Then I says to him in an ordinary voice, not expecting a dumfounding answer, I says, 'Ay, D. Fittis, and is there onything fresh in Thrums?'"

"He hacks away at the whins, but says he, 'The bural's this day.'"

"Man, I says, 'so there's a funeral! Wha's dead?'"

"Ye ken fine," says he implying as the thing was notorious.

"Na, I says, 'I dinna ken. Wha is it?'"

"Weel," says he, "it's Tammas Haggart."

Tammas always warned us here against attempting to realize his feelings at these monstrous words. "I dinna say I can picture my position now myself," he said, "but one thing sure is that for the moment these buttons slipped clean out of my head. It was an eerie-like thing to see D. Fittis cutting away at the whins after making such an announcement. A common death couldna have affected him less."

"Say wha's dead again, D. Fittis," I cries, minding that the body was daft.

"Tammas Haggart," says he, with the utmost confidence.

"Man, D. Fittis, I says, with uncontrolled indignation, 'ye're a big lair.'"

"Whoever ye are," says he, "I would lick ye for saying that if I could spare the time."

"Whoever I am!" I cries. "Very weel ye ken I'm Tammas Haggart."

"Wha's the liar now?" says he.

"I was a sort of staggered at this, and I says sharp-like, 'What did Tammas Haggart die of?'"

"I thoct that would puzzle him, if it was just his daftness that made him say I was gone, but he had his cause of death ready. 'He fell down the quarry,' says he.

"Weel, lads, his confidence about the thing sickened me, and I says, 'Leave these whins alone, D. Fittis, and tell me all about it.'"

"I canna stop my work," he says, "but Tammas Haggart fell down the quarry four nights since. Ou, it was in the middle of the night, and all Thrums

were sleeping when it was wakened by one awful scream. It wakened the whole town. Ay, a heap of folk set up sudden in their beds."

"And was that Tammas Haggart falling down the quarry?" I says, earnest-like, for I was a kind of awestruck.

"It was so," says he, tearing away in the whins.

"They didna find the body, though," I says, looking down on myself with satisfaction.

"Ay," says he, "the masons found it the next morning, and there was a richt rush of folk to see it."

"Ye had been there?" I says.

"I was," says he, "and so war the wife as lives beneath me. She took her bairn too, for she said, 'It'll be something for the little one to boast about having seen when he grows bigger.'"

Ay, man, it had been a mighty fall, and the face wasna recognizable."

"How did they ken, then," says I, "that it was Tammas Haggart?"

"Ou," says he at once, "they kent him by his top-coat."

"Lads, of course I saw in a klink that the man as stole my top-coat had fallen down the quarry and been mista'en for me. Weel, I nipped myself at that. It's an unco thing to say, but I admit I was glad to have this proof, as ye may call it, that it really me as was standing in the toad's hole."

"When did ye say the bural was?" I asked him.

"It's at half three this day," he says, "and I'll warrant it's half three now, so if ye want to be sure ye're no Tammas Haggart ye can see him buried."

"I took a long look at D. Fittis, and it's gospel I tell ye when I say I never liked him from that minute."

Then I hurried up the hill to the cemetery dyke, and sat down on it. Lads, I sat there, just at the very corner, whaur they've since put a cross to mark the spot, and I watched my ain bural. Yes, there I sat for near an hour, me, Tammas Haggart, an ordinary man at that time, getting sich an experience as has been denied to the most highly educated in the land. I'm no boasting, but facts is facts.

"I'm no saying it wasna a fearsome sight, for I had a terrible sinking at the heart, and a mortal terror took grip of me, so that I couldna have got off that dyke except by falling. Ay, and when the grave was filled up, and the mourners had dribbled away, I sat on with some uncommon thochts in my mind. It would be wearing on to four o'clock when I got up shivering, and walked back to whaur D. Fittis was working. There was a question I wanted to put to him."

"D. Fittis," I says, "was there ony of the Balribble folk as visited Tammas Haggart's wife in her affliction?"

"Ay," says the crittur, trying to break a supple whin with his foot, "the wife as lives beneath me was in the house at Tillyloss when in walks a grand laddy."

"So, so," I says, "and was Christy ta'en up like about her man bein' dead?"

"Ay," says D. Fittis, "she was greet-ing, but as soon as the grand woman comes in, Christy takes the wife as lives beneath me into a corner and whispers to her."

"D. Fittis," I says, sternly, "tell me what Christy Tood whispered, for muckle depends on it."

"Weel," he says, "she whispered, 'If the laddy calls the corpse James' dinna conterdict her.'"

"I denounced Christy in my heart at that, not being sufficient of a humorist to make allowance for women, and I says, just to see if the thing was commonly kent, I says,

"And wha would James be?"

"I dinna ken," says D. Fittis, "but maybe ye're James yersel', when ye canna be Tammas Haggart."

"Lads, ye see now that it was D. Fittis as put it into my head to do what I subsequently did. 'James,' I said, 'I'll be frae this hour, and without another word I walked off in the opposite direction frae Thrums."

"I dinna pretend as it was Christy's behavior alone that sent me wandering through the land. I had a dread of that funeral for one thing, and for another I had twelve gold guineas about me. Moreover, the ambition to travel took hold of me, and I thoct Christy's worst trials was over at ony rate, and that she was used to my being dead now."

"But the well-wisher, Tammas?" we would say at this stage.

"Ay, I'm coming to that. I walked at a mighty stride along the hill and round by the road at the back of the three-cornered wood to near as far as the farm of

Glassal, and there I sat down at the roadside. I was beginning to be mair anxious about Christy now, and to think I was fell fond of her for all her exasperating ways. I was torn with conflicting emotions, of which the one said, 'Back ye go to Tillyloss,' but the other says, 'Ye'll never have a chance like this again.' Well, I could not persuade myself, though I did my best, to gang back to my loon and hand over the siller to Christy, and so, as ye all ken, I compromised. I hurried back to the hill—"

"But ye've forgotten the cheese?"

"Na, listen: I hurried back to the hill, wondering how I could send a guinea to Christy, and I minded that I had about half a pound of cheese in my pouch, the which I had got at a farm in Glen Quharhy. Weel, I shoved a guinea into the cheese, and back I goes to the hill to D. Fittis."

"D. Fittis," I says, "I ken ye're an honest man, and I want ye to take this bit of cheese to Christy Todd."

"Ay," he says, "I'll take it, but no till it's ower dark for me to see the whins."

"What a busy crittur D. Fittis was, and to no end! I left the cheese with him, and was off again, when he cries me back."

"Wha will I say sent the cheese?" he asks, I considered a minute, and then I says, 'Tell her,' I says, 'that it is frae a well-wisher.'"

"These were my last words to D. Fittis, for I was feared other folk might see me, and away I ran. Yes, lads, I covered twenty miles that day, never stopping till I got to Dundee."

It was Haggart's way, when he told his story, to pause now and again for comments, and this was a point where we all wagged our heads, the question being whether his assumption of the character of a well wisher was not a clear proof of humor. "That there was humor in it," Haggart would say, when summing up, "I can now see, but compared to what was to follow, it was neither here nor there. My humor at that time was like a laddy trying to open a stiff gate, and even when it did squeeze past, the gate closed again with a snap. Ay, lads, just listen, and ye'll hear how it came about as the gate opened wide, never to close again."

"Ye had the stuff in ye, though," Lookaboutyou would say, "and therefore, I'm of opinion that ye've been a humorist frae the cradle."

"Little you ken about it," Haggart would answer. "No doubt I had the material of humor in me, but it was raw. I'm thinking cold water and kail and carrots and a penny bone are the materials broth is made of?"

"They are, they are."

"Ay, but it's no broth till it boils!"

"So it's no. Ye're richt, Tammas."

"Weel, then, it's the same with humor. Considering me as a humorist, ye might say that when my travels began I had put myself on the fire to boil."

(To be Continued.)

kind can point out the hare to their dogs, and confidently await results.

"Ye're wrang, Snecky," replied Haggart.

As ever, before shooting his bolt, he then paused. His mouth was open, and he had the appearance of a man hearkening intently for some communication from below. There were those who went the length of hinting that on these occasions something inside jumped to his mouth and told him what to say.

"Yes, Snecky," he said at last, "ye're wrang. My mouth was the tanker, and the folk I met had all to pay toll, as ye may say, for they dropped things into my mouth that my humor turns to as muckle account as though they were bawbees. I'm no sure—"

"There's no many things ye're no sure of, Tammas."

"And this is no one of them. It's just a form of expression, and if ye interrupt me again, Snecky Hobart, I'll say sarcastic thing about you that instant. What I was to say was that I'm no sure but what a humorist swallows everybody whole that he falls in with."

The impossibility of telling everything that befell Haggart in his wanderings is best proved in his own words:—

"My adventures," he said, "was so surprising thick that when I cast them over in my mind I'm like a man in a corn-field, and every stalk of corn an adventure. Lads, it's useless to expect me to give you the history of ilka stalk. I wrax out my left hand, and I grip something, namely, an adventure; or I wrax out my right hand and grip something, namely, another adventure. Well, by keeping straight on in any direction we wade through adventures till we get out of the field, that is to say, till we land back at Thrums. Ye say my adventures sounds different on different nights. Precisely, for it all depends on which direction I splash off in."

Without going the length of saying that Haggart splashed more than was necessary, I may perhaps express regret that he never saw his way to clearing up certain disputed passages in his wanderings. I would, I know, be ill-thought of among the friends who survive him if I stated for a fact that he never reached London. There was a general wish that he should have taken London in his travels, and if Haggart had a weakness it was his reluctance to disappoint an audience. I must own that he trod down his hand touched the corn-stalk called London, and that his London reminiscences never seemed to me to have quite the air of reality that filled his recollections of Edinburgh. Admitted that he confirmed glibly as an eye-witness the report that London houses have no gardens (except at the back), it remains undoubted that Craigeibuckle confused him with the question:—

"What do they charge in London for half-a-pound of boiling beef and a penny bone?"

(To be Continued.)

CHAPTER IV.

Not having a Haggart head on my shoulders I dare not attempt to follow the explorer step by step during his wanderings of the next five months. In that time he journeyed through at least one country, unconsciously absorbing everything that his conjurer's wand could turn to humor when the knaek came to him. This admission he has himself signed in conversation.

"Ay," he said, "I was like a blind beggar in these days, and the dog that led me by a string was my impulses."

Most of us let this pass, with the reflection that Haggart could not have said it in his pre-humorous days, but Snecky Hobart put in his word.

"Ye were hardly like the blind beggar," he said, "for ye didna carry a tanker for folk to put bawbees in."

Snecky explained afterwards that he only spoke to give Haggart an opportunity. It was, indeed, the way of all of us, when we saw an opening, to coax Tammas into it. So sportsmen of another

kind can point out the hare to their dogs, and confidently await results.

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